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C O N F I D E N T I A L KHARTOUM 002895

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TAGS: PGOV EAID PREL ASEC PREF PHUM US UN SU
SUBJECT: SLA,S MINNAWI MAY BE EXPLORING HIS OPTIONS

REF: A. KHARTOUM 02876

1B. KHARTOUM 02891

Classified By: CDA Cameron Hume, Reason: Section 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) This week,s attack on OXFAM and ACF NGO operations in Gereida was carried out by Minni Minawi,s SLA forces, according to a UN investigation (reflets). UN Deputy SRSG Manuel Da Silva told CDA Hume that signs of cooperation between National Redemption Front (NRF) forces and forces loyal to Minnawi have been increasing over the past month. Da Silva emphasized that the NRF forces that attacked the Abu Jabra oil facility in southeast Darfur had traveled to the point of attack through territory controlled by Minawi, apparently with Minawi,s knowledge. OXFAM and ACF staff members identified several SLA members as among their attackers. Within a half-hour of the attack the SLA returned to the ICRC a vehicle that had been taken "by accident."

12. (C) On December 21, CDA Hume met with Minawi,s political lieutenant Ali Traio. Hume explained that the SLA was blotting its copy book with the USG by its involvement in incidents like the attack at Gereida, especially the violent assault against a female staff member. The USG funded two-thirds of the humanitarian assistance in Darfur, so the theft of eleven vehicles was in effect theft of USG property. President Bush had explained to Minawi in their White House meeting that the U.S. main interest was in the humanitarian situation, and the SLA should respect humanitarian operations. Traio did not respond.

13. (C) Late on December 21, Minawi called CDA Hume to provide information that he had asked for "a full investigation." Minawi also said that he was planning a trip to Asmara starting on December 23 to meet with other Darfur leaders as part of his efforts to broaden support for the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA). Hume asked if he would meet with Abdel Wahid or Abdul Shaafi; Minawi said neither would be there, but he has spoken with both on the phone. However, he would meet with several G-19 leaders and probably with JEM leader Khalil Ibrahim. (Note: In other words he was going to meet with the leaders of the violent opposition to the DAP. End note.)

14. (C) Comment: Minawi appears to be exploring his options. Over the past several weeks commanders and units previously under his control have cooperated with G-19 units, such as those commanded by Adam Bakheit, especially in South Darfur. The meetings in Asmara are far more likely to concern more joint action on the ground in Darfur than to move JEM,s political position toward support for the DPA. Minawi, Ibrahim, and most of their forces are from the Zaghawa tribe, and that shared background will be important as the level of fighting escalates in Darfur. End comment.

HUME